

# **NEWS** *from the National Wildlife Refuge System*

October 3, 1996

FWS: Inez Connor 202-219-3861

NAS: Evan Hirsche 202-861-2242

## ***NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WEEK LAUNCHED WITH MAJOR AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE***

With historic Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge as a backdrop, John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society, and John Rogers, Acting Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, today signed a Memorandum of Understanding that cements the partnership between the two organizations to benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The Pelican Island refuge, established by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, was the first national wildlife refuge in a system that today spans the country with 511 units in all 50 states and territories. Today's event is the first of hundreds of celebrations being held by refuges across the country to commemorate the second annual National Wildlife Refuge Week. Audubon chapters are sponsoring several of the events.

"Audubon Society members convinced President Roosevelt to protect this important rookery for pelicans, egrets, and a host of other migratory birds," Rogers said. "Not only that, but when the government could not or would not provide funding, Audubon paid the first warden, not only here but at several of the other early refuges."

The agreement commits the two organizations to collaborate on local and national projects that will benefit individual wildlife refuges and the Refuge System. Typical projects include conducting nesting, breeding, and bird population studies, restoring habitat, preparing bird lists, and guiding birding and wildlife interpretive tours. Audubon chapters, affiliates, and members will be encouraged to meet with local refuge personnel to identify opportunities to work together and to volunteer their services and expertise.

In a statement issued today, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt praised the agreement, calling it "a union of federal and private resources to meet greater challenges faced by the refuge system. I applaud the efforts of the National Audubon Society and the Fish and Wildlife Service on behalf of the National Wildlife Refuge System and pledge my support to advance the goals of this unique and precious system of public lands."



**AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...**  
*where wildlife comes naturally!*

Flicker said the agreement is a major component of Audubon's 'Refuge Campaign.' The Refuge Campaign seeks to address an overarching concern that the National Wildlife Refuge System will benefit tremendously from a broadened base of public support.

Flicker said Audubon would actively seek to develop greater public awareness of the system and would encourage increased volunteer participation on local refuges. "Major opportunities exist on national wildlife refuges where Audubon can foster bird and wildlife conservation," Flicker said.

Rogers said the agreement serves as a model for carrying out provisions of President Clinton's March 1996 Executive Order which calls for greater public involvement and partnerships with the private and public sector in operating the refuge system, particularly in recreational activities.

"We recognize we cannot maintain this magnificent system alone, in a vacuum, but must continually look for opportunities to work with partners to strengthen our mission," Rogers said.

The event at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge included a reenactment of President Roosevelt's establishment of the refuge by the "Pelican Island Players," including a "live" appearance by Teddy Roosevelt, portrayed by Jim Foote.

The National Audubon Society is one of the Nation's oldest wildlife conservation organizations, with a membership of more than 550,000 members in 518 communities.

For more information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, the world's most outstanding network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife, call 1-800-344-WILD or visit the home page at <http://bluegoose.arw.r9.fws.gov>. Better yet, call or visit a nearby refuge.

-FWS-